



MARK GOTTLIEB

Speaker Pro Tempore
Wisconsin State Assembly

Testimony of Representative Mark Gottlieb
Senate Bill 25

Senate Committee on Campaign Finance Reform, Rural Issues and Information Technology
February 12, 2008

Chairman Kreitlow and Committee Members:

Thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 25, relating to fundraising during the state budget.

In December 2007, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute conducted its 28th annual statewide voter survey. Of the respondents to that survey:

- 44 percent said that the ethics of Wisconsin legislators have declined
- 50 percent said that the ethics of Wisconsin state government have declined
- 82 percent said that lobbyists have the most control over what state government spends, and
- 85 percent said that elected officials primarily represent either their own or special interests

This data is easy to summarize: The view of Wisconsin residents toward our political institutions, including the legislature, is reaching all-time lows.

Senate Bill 25 is a common sense proposal aimed at restoring the public's confidence that the state budget, and the votes of their elected representatives, are not for sale. Right now, there are at least sixteen states that either prohibit or severely restrict the raising of funds during their legislative sessions. Another twelve, including Wisconsin, have prohibitions or restrictions on lobbyist contributions during this time (see attachment). This bill bans all campaign fundraising by all elected state officials from January of each odd-numbered year until the budget has been passed.

In the Assembly I have introduced a companion to Senate Bill 25, it is Assembly Bill 61. Based on comments I've received on Assembly Bill 61, I introduced two amendments. The first amendment extends the fundraising prohibition for the governor or governor-elect and lieutenant governor or lieutenant governor-elect to include the period when the executive budget is being prepared. The second amendment applies the same prohibition to the four legislative campaign committees. Based on previous conversations with Senator Harsdorf, I understand she is open to moving this legislation forward with similar amendments attached.

This bill, if enacted, will provide the additional benefit of giving legislators, and the governor, a six month minimum "time out" from fundraising at the beginning of each legislative session. As you well know, the early months of each session are the time when many important non-budgetary proposals are being developed, introduced, and debated. Eliminating all fundraising during that period will allow each of us to concentrate fully on our legislative duties.

We all share a desire to serve in an institution that has the respect and confidence of the people we represent. Senate Bill 25 is not comprehensive campaign finance reform. It does not impose public financing or restrict the free speech rights of individuals or organizations. But it is a meaningful step forward.

Thank you and I'm happy to answer any questions.

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